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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. AND CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

Summary: As Taiwan's June 10 print media continued to concentrate on reporting the controversy over the foreign permanent residency status of officials in the Ma Ying-jeou administration, news coverage also focused on the upcoming talks between Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS), and on a Taiwan teenage golfer who captured the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) championship golf tournament in the U.S. Sunday. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" urged the Ma Ying-jeou administration to speed up its coordination and cooperation with the United States when cross-strait relations are moving in high gear toward improvement. An editorial in the pro-unification "United Daily News" reminded the KMT to watch out for the roles that the government and the party should play in the upcoming cross-strait talks. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News," on the other hand, criticized Ma's administration for "setting aside" Taiwan's sovereignty in its dealing with Beijing. End summary.

A) "Chance of a Lifetime for Taiwan; Do Not Mess It Up"

Deputy Editor-in-Chief Kuo Chen-lung wrote in the "International Column" in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (6/10):

"Taiwan's relations with mainland China are now in the midst of a precious moment, which barely occurs once in a hundred years. Yet there are many dangers and difficulties lying ahead, particularly when Beijing is acting proactively [to dictate the development of cross-strait relations] while Taiwan is gradually losing its initiative. The Ma [Ying-jeou] administration wants to take advantage of [Taiwan's] relations with the United States to balance [cross-strait relations] but is missing the best timing. ...

"... But given the current quick pace of change in cross-strait relations, [it is questionable] whether the United States and Taiwan are keeping up with the intensive and continuous communication [between China and Taiwan]. For example, the second day after the meeting between [Chinese President] Hu [Jintao] and [KMT Chairman] Wu [Poh-hsiung], the resumption of negotiations between Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) was announced. Did the United States know about it beforehand? Before the SEF leads a delegation to mainland China, has [Taiwan] consulted with the United States privately? These [moves] may seem to jeopardize Taiwan's sovereignty, but they are actually essential moves to 'balance' [changing cross-strait relations].

"What is even more worrisome is how [the Ma administration] will respond when [the future cross-strait talks] touch on the core security interests between the United States and Taiwan. For example, what is the Ma administration going to do if mainland representatives hint to their Taiwan counterparts in private meetings that [Taiwan's] ongoing purchase of weapons from the United States will have a negative impact on the amicable atmosphere on

both sides of the Strait?

"In fact, in Ma's inaugural speech and in Minister of National Defense Chen Chao-min's recent remarks made in the Legislative Yuan, both emphasized over and over again that Taiwan will maintain its independent national defense and will purchase necessary weapons. However, the problem is: Will [Taiwan] be able to reach a consensus with the United States and steadfastly draw a red line [telling China] that 'there is absolutely no room for negotiation' [over arms procurement from the United States] as [the island] grows more and more reliant on economic and trade cooperation with mainland China?

"Of course the moment for showdown has not arrived yet, and Beijing, understanding the sensitivity of the issue as well, will not put the issue on the table for the time being. In the meantime, the United States is reluctant to sell F-16C/D fighter jets to Taiwan because it is worried that [such a deal] will negatively affect the atmosphere surrounding the resumption of cross-Strait dialogue. In particular, officials in the Bush administration only have six months left in their term of office, so the administration definitely does not want to offend mainland China just to enhance U.S. relations with Taiwan.

"However, the countdown is gradually speeding up. How to arrange and define [Taiwan's] relation with the United States is an issue that Ma's administration must think about immediately. Nevertheless, [Taiwan's] representative to the United States is yet to take office, and his deputy who is supposed to assist him is undecided as well. When compared with its hasty attitude toward the mainland policy, [Ma administration] is indeed getting out of balance in terms of its policy toward the United States.

"Some people suggested that senior officials at [Taiwan's] National Security Council (NSC) visit the United States as soon as possible. Besides establishing a mechanism in which every [Taiwan] agency has a counterpart [in the United States] and renewing the NSC's understanding of the secret agreements and tacit consensus reached between the United States and Taiwan over the last eight years, what is more important [for Taiwan] is to report to the United States directly on what happens in the SEF-ARATS talks and to come up with a policy timetable within the next six months. The next few months will be a key period for Ma, and it will be a key period in Taiwan's history as well. Ma and his NSC staff have no right to screw it up."

B) "'Bridge' and 'Road': Concerted Attack by Converging the Two Tracks of Party and Government"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (6/10):

"... The current circumstances may seem to bode well for both sides of the Taiwan Strait. But a comparison of how the governments on both sides of the Taiwan Strait react to such developments show that Beijing has been working in an orderly fashion in terms of its strategy and level of officials [dealing with Taiwan]. It is obvious that Beijing has it all planned out. But a look at the Taiwan's side showed that since winning the election on March 22, the new [Ma Ying-jeou] administration has been inconsistent in terms of its speed, progress, and the level of officials [who engage with China] -- a move that has confused both its rival and the administration itself and has thus created uncertainty for interaction across the Strait. Both President Ma and KMT Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung reached a good tacit agreement prior to Wu's visit to China last month, which thus made the two tracks -- the government and the party -- coordinate with each other quite smoothly. It requires careful planning and some break-in for the KMT to learn from this successful experience, so that it will not 'run out of control' or even let the role of the 'second track' override that of the government. ..."

C) "Ma's Concessions Risk Our Future"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (6/10):

"... Ma's administration seems to believe they are adopting a 'soft' non-ideological approach with 'flexibility and pragmatism' that will bring more benefits to Taiwan. But what Ma is actually doing is 'setting aside' the sovereignty of Taiwan in an approach that is 'inflexible and unrealistic' and which is driven by the KMT's hoary ideology of 'great Chinese nationalism.' Ma's statement that 'the people on both sides of the Strait belong to the Chinese nation,' has delivered a clear message to the Taiwanese people that, regardless of the mainstream Taiwan-centric identity, their new government considers Taiwan to be part of 'China' and to have no intrinsic identity except as an instrument to 'link up with China.'

"Ma seems intent on making unilateral concessions of Taiwan's sovereignty so that Beijing may kindly bestow Taiwan some survival space, presumably under the lasting 'complete governance' of the CCP's 'elder brother' China-centric party. However, this weak-kneed mentality will only bring '100 disadvantages and no benefits' to Taiwan. Internally, Taiwan will lose precious time and space to consolidate its national development, which is entwined and mutually dependent with the concept of a citizen based Taiwan national identity fostered under both Lee Teng-hui and the former DPP government. The KMT's evident attempt to supplant the historically and democratically-grounded citizen-based concept of Taiwan identity with a vague attachment to a 'great Chinese nation' lacks any clear vision of what kind of society the 23 million people on Taiwan should build and what our distinct place in the world community should be. ..."

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